

SHORT TAKES

Online fraud gang busted, 5 nabbed

New Delhi: The Delhi police has busted an online investment fraud syndicate and arrested five people in the case, an official said on Tuesday. The syndicate, responsible for duping victims by promising high returns on investments, was found to have defrauded a complainant of ₹19.27 lakh. It was later linked to transactions exceeding ₹2.5 crore across multiple states, the official said. The case came to light when a complainant from Sadh Nagar approached the cyber police station on October 18. She reported being contacted in July by a woman posing as a lead analyst offering profitable investment guidance, the police said. "Initially, she invested ₹1 lakh but was later coerced into contributing ₹10 lakh towards a fabricated Initial Public Offering (IPO). Eventually, the syndicate defrauded her of ₹19.27 lakh," DCP Surendra Choudhary said. The officer said that an FIR was registered and further investigation was initiated. The police team tracked the money trail and the funds were traced to a private bank in Ludhiana, Punjab, registered under a fake firm owned by one of the accused, Ravit Kumar (29).

Engineer, 2 other held for arms' supply

New Delhi: Three people, including a BTech graduate, were arrested for their alleged involvement in supply of arms and ammunition in Delhi, the police said on Tuesday. The accused have been identified as Rajesh Choube (46) from Madhya Pradesh, Aviral Sharma (35) from Uttar Pradesh and Jitender Singh (42) from Rajasthan, they said. "On November 28, a tip off regarding a key member of arms supply syndicate, Rajesh was received that he was coming near Sector-18, Metro station, Rohini to deliver huge consignment of illegal fire arms," DCP (special cell) Amit Kaushik said. A trap was laid and Rajesh was arrested. Five semi-automatic pistols with 200 live cartridges were recovered from him, Mr Kaushik said.

4 hurt in cylinder blast in factory

New Delhi: Four people were injured in an LPG cylinder blast in a heater factory in northeast Delhi's Shiv Vihar area, an official said on Tuesday. A call regarding the blast in the mini LPG cylinder was received at 3.36 pm and four fire tenders were rushed, the Delhi fire service (DFS) official said. The fire affected the ground floor of the two-storey building. Four people trapped on the premises were rescued and taken to the GTB Hospital, the official said. The police said the fire was brought under control within an hour and further probe was underway.

COAST GUARD, AIIMS SIGN MoU FOR CPR TRAINING

New Delhi: The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and AIIMS-Delhi have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to enhance the medical training and capabilities of the coast guard medical officers. The MoU focuses on providing specialised training in Indian guidelines for cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), aiming to equip the coast guard personnel with critical life-saving skills. The agreement was signed by Surg Cmdr Sanjay Dutta on behalf of the ICG and Dr Shailendra Kumar, CRTC AIIMS coordinator. This collaboration represents a milestone in bolstering medical readiness within the ICG. AIIMS will offer structured and advanced training to coast guard medical officers, ensuring they are well-prepared to handle medical emergencies in operationally challenging environments, Mr Kumar said. During the ceremony, Surg Cmdr Dutta highlighted the critical importance of this initiative for enhancing emergency care capabilities at sea. Mr Kumar reaffirmed AIIMS's commitment to promoting excellence in healthcare training. This partnership reflects a shared commitment to safeguarding lives through enhanced medical preparedness and collaboration, he said.

Delhi Dec. power demand at new high

Peaks over 5K MW, green energy will meet up to 53% of over 3,900 MW

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 31

The plummeting temperature in Delhi has raised power demand to newer heights with December clocking a peak of 5,213 MW, the highest ever for the month, discom officials said.

For the first time in Delhi's history, the peak power demand in December has crossed the 5,000 MW mark, they said.

As per the state load dispatch centre (SLDC), power demand stood at 5,213 MW at 10:50 am on Tuesday, after touching 5,046 MW on Monday.

Delhi's peak power demand in December was 4,884 MW in 2023 and 4,964 MW in 2022, discom officials said.

The winter months in Delhi are expected to follow the record-breaking summer trend in peak power demand, which touched an unprecedented high of 8,656 MW this year.

As per officials, the peak power demand in the capital this winter is expected to cross 6,300 MW.

A BSES spokesperson said that green energy



A woman with a child during a cold winter day in Gurgaon on Tuesday. —PTI

will meet up to 53 per cent of the over 3,900 MW peak power demand in areas under BSES Rajdhani Power Limited (BRPL) and BSES Yamuna Power Limited (BYPL).

Advanced artificial intelligence and machine learning tools are also being used for accurate forecasting to tackle the growing winter power demand, he said.

BRPL and BYPL successfully met this season's peak winter power demand of 2,194 MW and 1,038 MW in their respective areas so far, the spokesperson said.

Last winter, the peak hit 5,816 MW on January 22, marking the highest level recorded in the national capital in winter months.

The peak power demand in areas within BRPL and BYPL are projected to exceed 2,600 MW and 1,240 MW, respectively, officials said.

The Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (TPDDL) met this winter season's peak power demand of 1,646 MW on Tuesday, the highest till date, without any power outages or network constraints, a spokesperson of the discom said.

Overcast sky marks year's last day in city

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 31

An overcast sky marked the last day of the year in Delhi on Tuesday, with the national capital's maximum temperature settling 2.7 notches below normal at 17.7°C. The minimum temperature had settled 2.6 notches above normal at 9.6°C, the Met office said.

The humidity level fluctuated between 81 per cent and 87 per cent, it added.

The Met has predicted partly cloudy skies for Wednesday.

Smog or shallow fog is expected during the evening and the night.

The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to settle at 17 and 8°C, respectively.

The national capital's 24-hour air quality index (AQI) was recorded in the 'poor' category with a reading of 283 at 4 pm.

Kejriwal pathological liar, says Cong's Dikshit

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 31

Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit on Tuesday lashed out at Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) supremo Arvind Kejriwal, calling him a "pathological liar."

Mr Dikshit, who is the Congress' candidate from the New Delhi constituency for the upcoming Assembly polls, also said he is going to file a criminal and civil defamation case against chief minister Atishi and AAP MP Sanjay Singh for alleging that he had received money from the BJP.

"A few days ago, the CM said that we are taking money from the BJP. After this press conference, I will file a criminal and civil defamation case against (CM) Atishi and Sanjay Singh. I will ask for ₹10 crore and out of that money, I will donate ₹5 crore to Yamuna cleaning and the remaining half will be donated to clean the polluted air in Delhi," he said.

"They used to say that they have increased sewage treatment by 1.5 times in Delhi. When the Congress lost the elections, the sewage treat-



Sandeep Dikshit

ment capacity was at 604 MGD and it remains the same today. The former chief minister lies that he has increased sewage treatment work," Mr Dikshit alleged.

The lieutenant-governor took a review in 2023 and it was found that the pollution effluent going into Yamuna has doubled in the last seven to eight years, he said.

The Congress leader said they have also claimed that they have saved money in the construction of flyovers.

"The initial estimate of Madhuban to Mukarba Chowk flyover by Sheila Dikshit's government was ₹422 crore, but we built it at ₹297 crore. The former government estimated the construction of Mangolpuri to Madhuban Chowk at ₹423 crore, we built it at ₹323 crore," Mr Dikshit said.

AAP's Pujari scheme appeasement move, says BJP's Bansuri

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 31

BJP MP Bansuri Swaraj called the 'Pujari Granthi Samman Yojna' announced by AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal an "appeasement" move ahead of the upcoming Assembly polls. In a press conference, the New Delhi MP challenged Mr Kejriwal to implement the schemes announced by him, including the 'Mahila Samman Yojna', saying there is no model code of conduct in place.

Mr Kejriwal on Monday announced a monthly honorarium of ₹18,000 for all the Hindu temple priests and granthis after the AAP returns to power in February.

Ms Bansuri said that the AAP government was not able to pay ₹18,000 to Imams of mosques for months due to lack of funds and yet Mr Kejriwal was trying to appease the priests and granthis just before the elections.

She questioned why no honorarium was paid to the priests and granthis in the last 10 years.

L-G office rubbishes CM claims of temple demolition order

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 31

A fresh war of words erupted on Tuesday between the Delhi government and the lieutenant-governor office over the alleged order to demolish religious structures in the city.

In a letter addressed to Delhi L-G V.K. Saxena, chief minister Atishi said, "It has been brought to my attention that the religious committee has ordered the demolition of numerous religious structures all across Delhi, in a meeting dated 22.11.2024".

Responding to the letter, L-G Secretariat said, "Neither are any temples, mosques, churches or any other place of worship being broken or demolished and nor has any file to this effect come".

Meanwhile, Ms Atishi in her letter said, "Until

Police files chargesheet, both accused arrested

Cop killed for chiding 2 men drinking in car

AGE CORRESPONDENT
WITH AGENCY INPUTS
NEW DELHI, DEC. 31

An on-duty constable was killed in September allegedly for rebuking two people for drinking on the road in outer Delhi, according to a 400-page chargesheet filed by the Delhi Police.

According to the chargesheet, Sandeep Malik (30) was performing his night duty in civil clothes on September 29 when he spotted Dharmender (39) and Rajnish (25) drinking in a car in the Nagloi area.

An official, citing the chargesheet, said when Malik rebuked the accused, an argument broke out between them. They rammed their vehicle into Malik's bike, dragging it for 10 meters.

Following this, Sandeep suffered critical head injuries and was rushed to a hospital by the other policemen.

Doctors declared him dead on

THE INVESTIGATIONS revealed that the accused were known to Malik as he was a resident of the same locality at Veena Enclave in Nagloi

POLICE SAID that the police have made a watertight chargesheet to ensure justice for the constable and his family

arrival, officials said. The incident was captured on the CCTV camera, around 2.15 am.

A 400-page chargesheet was filed at Tis Hazari court on December 27.

The police in its chargesheet have made two people - Dharmender and Rajnish the main accused while two others - Jitender alias Jeetu and Manoj Shareman -- were named for harbouring Dharmender.

Both Dharmender and Rajnish were arrested.

A senior officer said that the police have made

a watertight chargesheet to ensure justice for the constable and his family.

Delhi Police had registered an FIR under sections 221 (obstructing public servant in discharge of his public functions), 132 (Assault or criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty), 103 (murder), 249 (harbouring offender) and 3(5)(acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention) of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita at Nagloi police station.

The investigations revealed that the accused were known to Malik as he was a resident of the same locality at Veena Enclave in Nagloi.

A native of Haryana's Rohtak, Malik lived with two other police constables in a rented accommodation, police said.

Dharmender had borrowed the car from his friend Amit, whose statement has also been added to the chargesheet.

BJP MLAs protest in Assembly, demand session for CAG reports

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 31

The BJP MLAs on Tuesday held a sit-in at Delhi Assembly speaker Ram Niwas Goel's office and demanded that he convene a special session for tabling 14 pending CAG reports. Leader of Opposition Vijender Gupta said a memorandum was handed over to the speaker, urging him to call a special session without further delay.

The AAP government has shown a lack of accountability by not tabling the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) reports in the Assembly, he alleged.

The CAG has submitted audit reports of various

departments for 2017-18 to 2021-22 to the Delhi government. These reports have been pending with the government for two years, Mr Gupta said. "Failure to table the reports in the House not only violates the constitutional rights of Assembly members but also undermines public trust as citizens have a right to know how public funds are being utilised," he asserted.

The BJP legislators have also approached Delhi high court for a direction to the government for tabling the pending reports.

Mr Gupta said the government informed the high court on December 24 that the reports were sent to the Assembly Secretariat.

NORTHERN RAILWAY NOTICE INVITING TENDER	
Name of Work and its location	30-Elect-58-T-2024-25-E3 Electrical work in connection with Repair of defective solar plant, solar water heater (SWH), solar pumps and stand-alone solar street light and CAMC of above plant over Delhi Division.
Approx. cost of the works in	Rs. 207.08 lacs
Address of the office	Sr. Divl Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.
Earnest Money	Rs. 253600.00
Date & time of submission of tender	27.01.2025, 12.00 Hrs.
Opening of tender	27.01.2025, 12.00 Hrs
Website & notice board	www.ireps.gov.in & Sr. Divl. Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi
3991/2024	
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE	

Police intensifies vehicle checking across Delhi on New Year's Eve

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 31

The Delhi police ramped up vehicle checking across the city on the New Year's Eve on Tuesday, setting barricades and imposing restrictions of traffic movement, particularly in and around Connaught Place. All the roads leading to Connaught Place, including KG Marg, Parliament Street Barakhamba Road and Janpath, are closed for traffic and the police is directing commuters to take alternative routes.

Besides central Delhi, the vehicles are being checked intensively at key locations of the city, including south Delhi's Hauz Khas and Saket, east Delhi's Vikas Marg, west Delhi's Rajouri Garden.

Spiderman moves thief lands in police net, 5 cases solved

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 31

The Delhi police has arrested a burglar nicknamed 'spider-man' for his ability to scale walls and sneak into homes undetected from the Kabir Nagar area in northwest district, an official said on Tuesday.

"Our team from Sangam Park has apprehended Yogesh, a notorious burglar who earned the nickname 'spider-man' for his unique methods of sneaking into houses," deputy commissioner of police, (northwest), Bhisham Singh, said.

On December 27, a resident of Bharat Nagar filed a complaint claiming his house was trespassed during the night, and valuable items, including two mobile phones, PAN card,

Aadhaar card and other documents, were stolen, the officer said.

After analysing over 50 CCTV footage, the police identified the accused through his movements near the crime scene.

"Local intelligence and informers were pressed into service, leading to Yogesh's arrest from his residence in Kabir Nagar. During interrogation, Yogesh confessed to the burglary and his involvement in other thefts. The stolen items were also recovered from his possession," the DCP said.

With his arrest, the police also cracked five previous cases registered against him in Roop Nagar, Maurya Enclave, Khyala, and Jahangir Puri, the officer added.

Gurgaon police foils robbery bid, 3 arrested

Gurgaon, Dec. 31: The Gurgaon police has foiled a robbery bid by arresting three miscreants from near the Signature Global building on Fazilpur road in Badshahpur, officials said on Tuesday.

Acting on a tip-off about the trio plotting a robbery near the Signature Global building on Monday night, a police team from Sector 39 conducted a raid and arrested Prakash (26) and Sumit alias Lala (29), both residents of Gurugram, and Devender alias Deva (22) from Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh.

—PTI

HC junks plea for action against doctors

'Important to remember that med negligence is not established by dissatisfaction'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 31

The Delhi high court recently rejected a man's plea seeking action against doctors over his wife's death and said medical negligence was not merely established by dissatisfaction towards an expected standard of care.

Justice Sanjeev Narula, in his December 20 verdict, said doctors should not be constrained either

by the expectations or timelines set by the patient's family.

The judge said, "It is paramount to remember that medical negligence is not established by mere dissatisfaction or the assertion of an 'expected' standard of care...It is acknowledged that doctors are expected to apply a reasonable level of expertise and exercise due diligence in their practices...The proper criterion for

determining medical negligence lies in assessing whether the actions of the doctor fall below the accepted standards of a reasonably competent practitioner within the relevant field."

The man's wife died in 2016 allegedly owing to the medical negligence of certain doctors at a private hospital.

The court observed that while doctors were bound to prioritise the well-being of the patient and

to administer the most appropriate treatment, they should not be constrained by the expectations or timelines set by the patient's family.

The court said, "While the petitioner may have preferred quicker actions, the doctors had to assess a critically unstable patient, manage immediate crises, and prioritise interventions according to clinical necessity, not family expectations."

SHORT TAKES

Charred body found in Kerala college hall

Thiruvananthapuram: A charred body was found inside an unfinished hall of an engineering college at Karakulam on Tuesday morning, the police said. The body was found by the college's security staff at around 8 am, it said. Items such as a charred tyre and a petrol can were found at the scene, they said. According to the police, it could be a case of suicide. The college owner's mobile phone was found nearby, and his car was parked outside the building, raising suspicion that the body was his. The police said that a DNA examination will be necessary to confirm the identity of the deceased. Reports indicate that the mobile phone had been placed on a chair, possibly to record the incident. State food and civil supplies minister G.R. Anil visited the location. A scientific investigation is currently underway to gather further evidence, the police added. — *PTI*

Gehlot blames Centre over Manmohan row

Jaipur: Former Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot on Tuesday claimed the controversy over the cremation of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and land for his memorial would not have risen had the Centre come forward and taken a decision on the matter. The veteran Congress leader also targeted the BJP government in Rajasthan, calling it “*nakara*” (idle) and “*nikamma*” (worthless), the same words he once used for his *bête noire* and former deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot. Mr Gehlot's comments came days after the Congress accused the Centre of insulting Manmohan Singh by carrying out his last rites at the Nigambodh Ghat (in Delhi), instead of a designated spot that could have turned into his memorial. — *PTI*

Hoarding collapse in Maha: Accused held

Mumbai: The Mumbai police has arrested a key accused in the Ghatkopar hoarding collapse case from Uttar Pradesh capital Lucknow, officials said on Tuesday. The accused, identified as businessman Arshad Khan (42), was on the run for the last seven months after being called to record his statement in connection with the case, an official said. As many as 17 persons were killed and more than 80 injured after the gigantic illegal hoarding crashed on a petrol pump in the Ghatkopar area in Mumbai amid gusty winds and rain on May 13. During the investigation, it came to light that Ego Media Private Limited, which installed the hoarding, had transferred 82 lakhs to the bank accounts of some people linked to Arshad Khan, the official said. — *PTI*

‘HARASSMENT’ OVER UNPAID FEE: DALIT ENDS LIFE

Bhiwani, Dec. 31: The police has launched an investigations over allegations that a young Dalit woman, a college student, committed suicide due to harassment she faced over unpaid fee in the institution where she studied. The 22-year-old woman's family has alleged that she was distressed due to pressure to pay her pending fee and also harassed. She was a B.A. final year student at a private women's college in Bhiwani district. She committed suicide on the night of December 24, the police said. Her father Jagdish told the media that his daughter was to appear in her fifth-semester exams this month but was not allowed to do so by the college authorities over a pending fee. He said he was unable to pay her fee on time due to some financial constraints. He also alleged that she was “harassed and tortured” by the college principal and some others. “I want justice for my daughter,” he said. “During investigations many angles have come up. An FIR has been lodged and investigations are on,” Loharu police station in-charge inspector Jitender said on Tuesday. When asked about the allegations that the student was harassed, he said, “We are conducting investigations. No suicide note was found.” — *PTI*

Vijayan slams Maha minister’s mini Pak remark against state ‘Rane’s remark reflects Sangh’s hate campaign against Kerala’

AGE CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
DEC. 31

Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan has strongly condemned Maharashtra minister Nitesh Rane's comment describing Kerala as “mini Pakistan.” The chief minister labelled the statement as highly provocative and unacceptable, adding that it reflected the Sangh Parivar's basic approach towards the state.

The Sangh Parivar believes that it can isolate a place that's difficult for them to influence by alienating and spreading hate campaigns and these statements came as part of that, he said.

A minister, who made the hate statement, does not



deserve to continue in the position, Mr Vijayan said.

The chief minister also emphasised that such remarks are part of a divisive and harmful agenda.

“This statement is a blatant attack on Kerala's ethos and the spirit of unity in India. The minister has no right to continue in office,” said Vijayan.

“Surprisingly, the leadership of the ruling party in

the country has not responded to the minister's action of committing a serious breach of oath that is an insult to the Constitution of the country,” Mr Vijayan said.

CPI state secretary Binoy Viswam echoed Mr Vijayan's sentiments, calling for Mr Rane's removal from the Maharashtra Cabinet. He said the minister's remarks were against

the country's secular fabric and federal principles.

Opposition leader V.D. Satheesan drew a parallel between Mr Rane's remarks and those of CPM politburo member A. Vijayaraghavan, who recently suggested that radical Islamists were behind the back-to-back victories of Congress in Wayanad. Mr Satheesan argued that both the BJP and the CPM were pursuing a similar divisive political narrative.

Mr Rane termed Kerala a “mini Pakistan” and claimed that “all terrorists vote for Gandhis,” referring to the election victories of Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra from the Wayanad Lok Sabha seat.

Journos regain access to state secretariat ‘Odisha lifts curbs on scribes imposed during Patnaik rule’

AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, DEC. 31

In a landmark move, Odisha's new BJP government, led by chief minister Mohan Charan Majhi, has initiated steps to restore journalists' access to Lok Seva Bhavan, the state secretariat in Bhubaneswar.

The department of information and public relations (I&PR) has issued an official notification allowing media personnel to resume day-to-day coverage of government activities.

This decision overturns restrictions introduced by the previous BJD government during the Covid-19 pandemic, which had

THE GOVT has issued an official notification allowing media personnel to resume day-to-day coverage of government activities

barred journalists from entering the secretariat, significantly limiting access to information.

The move, according to senior journalists in the state, signals the Majhi government's commitment to transparency and openness. Both accredited and non-accredited journalists will now be granted entry, ensuring broader media representation and inclusivity.

Observers believe this policy change will strengthen communica-

‘Under BJP regime, deprived suffering brunt of Manuvaad’

Kharge mentions 5 incidents against Dalits in BJP-led states

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 31

Keeping up its attack on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Congress on Tuesday accused the BJP governments at the Centre and the states of having a mindset against the deprived sections of society who are suffering because of the brunt of ‘Manuvaad’. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, in a post on X, mentioned at least five incidents where the deprived sections of the society suffered in the BJP-governed states.

Mr Kharge alleged that while Union home minister Amit Shah insults Babasaheb B.R. Ambedkar in Parliament, the same mindset against the deprived is being repeated in the BJP-ruled



Mallikarjun Kharge

states. He added a crime is committed every hour against Dalit-tribal women and children and according to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), this figure has doubled since 2014.

He claimed that in the last two days a Dalit youth was murdered in police custody in Madhya Pradesh's Dewas and the tribal women were tied to trees and beaten up in Balasore, Odisha. “In

Haryana's Bhiwani, a Dalit girl student is forced to co'mmit suicide after being unable to pay her BA exam fees; in Maharashtra's Palghar, a tribal pregnant woman has to travel 100 kilometres in search of ICU and dies; and in Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh, three Dalit families are forced to migrate because of caste-based attacks on them and the police remain silent,” Mr Kharge said.

“It is well known that atrocities are being committed against Dalits, tribals, backward and minority communities under the ‘anti-constitutional rule’ of the Modi government. Those who are poor and deprived are suffering the brunt of Manuvaad,” the Congress chief alleged.

No paper leak proof in PSC exam: Bihar mantri

Patna, Dec. 31: Amid the stalemate over demand for cancellation of a recent competitive exam in Bihar, a close aide of chief minister Nitish Kumar on Tuesday asserted that it has received no evidence, so far, of question paper leak. The averment came from Vijay Kumar Chaudhary, one of the senior-most ministers in the state Cabinet, a day after the chief secretary spoke to a delegation of protesters, in a gesture aimed at breaking the deadlock.

Speaking to reporters, Mr Chaudhary said, “The government could not have acted with greater clarity. The top official gave a patient hearing to the aggrieved party. But, to my information, no evidence of question paper leak has been furnished so far.”

“So, as of now, we hold

that there has been no paper leak. This is also the stand of the public service commission. One examination centre had witnessed some disturbances and a re-examination has been ordered for the candidates who were affected,” the minister said.

“But obviously, there was a conspiracy. Rumours of question paper leak were spread, but nobody knew where was it leaked, and to whom. Those behind this played with the future of young students. They must be unmasked,” he said.

The Combined Competitive Exams were held on December 13 when hundreds, all of them at the Babu Pariksha Parisar in the state capital, boycotted the test alleging that the question paper had been leaked. — *PTI*

Assam tribal group has a unique BTR development plan

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, DEC. 31

Bodoland Territorial Region chief Pramod Boro has embarked upon an ambitious plan by releasing a first-of-its-kind community vision document aimed at addressing the aspirations of all 26 communities living within the council areas.

The document aims to promote inclusivity and tackle persistent challenges such as economic underdevelopment and lack of employment opportunities. He emphasised that the document aligns with the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and is designed to cater to the unique needs of the region's 35 lakh people, ensuring equal representation for all communities.

The initiative to create this community-based development

plan for developing the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) began more than six months ago.

“An expert group was formed to hold a series of consultations with the representatives of each community to understand their problems and examine the memorandums they submitted,” Mr Boro added.

The Bodoland Territorial Region chief said the demands and aspirations of each community were slotted into three categories — those that can be addressed by the Council, the state, and the Centre. He added that the demands and aspirations of each community within their limited means will be supported by the Council, while issues outside their ambit would be forwarded to the state and central governments.

Armed forces await theatreisation progress

Unified theatre commands: A delayed defence initiative

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 31

Five years after the creation of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) office, the core objective of establishing theatre commands remains unrealised, raising concerns about delays in military integration.

The late Gen. Bipin Rawat, India's first CDS, took office in January 2020 with a mandate to oversee the creation of theatre commands. These commands aim to integrate the Army, Navy, and Air Force under unified leadership to ensure coordinated responses in conflicts. Despite government decisions, the lack

THE CONCEPT of theatre commands gained prominence during the Kargil War, highlighting the need for joint operations

of progress on this initiative has drawn criticism.

The concept of theatre commands gained prominence during the Kargil War, highlighting the need for joint operations. India currently has 19 commands, but the envisioned structure involves three primary commands: a northern command for the China border, a western command for Pakistan, and a maritime command for sea threats. Among these, the

maritime command appears most feasible as it primarily involves naval assets.

Resistance from the Indian Air Force, concerned about the division of its shrinking fighter squadron resources, has slowed progress. As a compromise, the proposal for an integrated air defense command was deferred.

Steps toward integration include officer cross-transfers and unified performance reports for senior officers. Additionally, the Inter-Services Organisations Bill, 2023, was passed to grant tri-service commanders administrative and disciplinary powers.

KIND ATTENTION

RESIDENT WELFARE ASSOCIATIONS/ BUILDERS/ PROJECT PROPONENTS/CITIZENS/NGOs

PROVIDE ELECTRIC HEATERS AND WARM CLOTHING TO SECURITY AND OTHER STAFF

AVOID OPEN BURNING AND AIR POLLUTION

Citizens are requested to:

Avoid open burning of biomass & solid waste

Do not use coal and wood for heating purpose

LET'S PROTECT OUR AIR TOGETHER !

Delhi Pollution Control Committee

https://dpcc.delhigovt.nic.in

Scan QR code to Download Green Delhi App

SHORT TAKES

Ex-CBI officer loses medal over bribe

New Delhi: The government has “cancelled” the Union home minister’s medal for “excellence in investigation” awarded in 2023 to the CBI inspector Rahul Raj who was later caught red-handed by the agency, allegedly receiving a ₹10 lakh bribe, and dismissed from the service. The disciplinary action came after the recommendation of CBI director Praveen Sood who has cracked down on corrupt elements detected in the agency’s internal vigilance process, the officials of the agency said. Raj, a recipient of a prestigious medal in 2023, was caught “red-handed” on May 19, while allegedly accepting an illegal gratification of ‘10 lakh from Malay College of Nursing chairman Anil Bhaskaran and his wife Suma Anil, an official alleged. The couple were also arrested.

In UP, Dalit is beaten to death, cousin hurt

Muzaffarnagar: A Dalit youth was beaten to death and his cousin seriously injured by some men after a dispute erupted between them in Paldi village here on Tuesday, police said. Superintendent of police (city) Satyanarayan Prajapat said that some people have been detained in connection with the murder of 20-year-old Sunny. Sunny was returning to his village from Khatauli, along with his cousin Shilu on a motorcycle. A quarrel broke out between Sunny and the village head’s son who was travelling in a car, the police said. The argument escalated and the two brothers were attacked with lathies by the accused, in which Sunny died and Shilu got injured, they said. The body has been sent for post-mortem examination. Meanwhile, security has been tightened in the village and extra police force have been deployed in the area as a precautionary measure. Efforts are on to nab the accused, the police said in a statement. — *PTI*

2 minors among 6 held for 2 murders

Raipur: Six persons, including two minors, were apprehended on Tuesday for allegedly killing two men over a dispute on drinking liquor, city police said. Kham Singh Sahu (47), his sons Durgesh (23) and Evan Kumar (18), Dalendra Sahu (18), and two 16 and 17-year-old boys, have been taken into custody, an official said. Krishna Yadav (27) and Sachin Badole (29) were found by the roadside with their heads crushed with a stone in the small hours of Tuesday. As per the investigation, the deceased and the accused were residents of Changorabhata area under DD Nagar police station limits. The accused were sitting around a bonfire at Kala Putia Chowk in the city on Monday night, and Yadav and Badole were consuming alcohol nearby, said an official. — *PTI*

COLD INTENSIFIES IN J&K, CHILLY DAY IN RAJ, U.P.

New Delhi, Dec. 31: Cold-wave conditions intensified across Kashmir on Tuesday, with the Met office predicting fresh spells of light to moderate snowfall in the Valley during the week, while large swathes of Uttar Pradesh witnessed maximum temperatures dipping by more than 5°C. Parts of Rajasthan experienced intense chill as neighbouring Haryana, and Punjab continued to witness biting cold conditions. Gulmarg, a tourist resort town in north Kashmir, recorded a low of minus 11.5°C, the Met office said. Pahalgal, the base camp for the annual Amarnath Yatra in south Kashmir, registered a minimum temperature of minus 8.4°C. In Srinagar, the mercury dipped to minus 3.5°C. Qazigund — the gateway town to Kashmir — logged a minimum temperature of minus 7.5°C. In south Kashmir, Kokernag recorded a minimum temperature of minus 5.6°C. The Met office has forecast light snowfall on New Year’s Day and another spell of moderate snowfall later in the week. “A feeble western disturbance is likely to hit Kashmir on January 1-2. There is a possibility of light snow at scattered places,” it said. — *PTI*

Leaders reiterate ‘vision of free and open Indo-Pacific’ Quad sends tough signal to China

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 31

In what is being seen as a clear message to China ahead of the Quad summit to be hosted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2025, which is expected to be attended by new US President Donald Trump, the foreign ministers of the four Quad nations — India, US, Japan and Australia — issued a joint statement on New Year’s Eve, in which they reiterated their “vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific that is peaceful, stable, and prosperous”.

On the 20th anniversary of the “Quad cooperation”, External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar, US secretary of state Antony Blinken and the Japanese and Australian foreign ministers said the “Quad countries now work together



Narendra Modi



Donald Trump

and with partners across the Indo-Pacific to address complex challenges, from fighting climate change, cancer, and pandemics, to bolstering quality infrastructure, maritime domain awareness, STEM education, counter-terrorism efforts, critical and emerging technologies, and cyber security”.

It may be noted that Mr Jaishankar has just wrapped up a week-long visit to the US during which he met Mr Blinken

and other key figures of the Biden administration.

The joint statement, meanwhile, pointed out, “Twenty years ago, in response to the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, Australia, India, Japan and the United States came together in service to the people of our region for the first time as the grouping now known as the Quad. The tsunami was one of the worst disasters in history, claiming the lives of near-

ly a quarter million people and displacing 1.7 million across 14 countries. Together our four countries contributed over 40,000 emergency responders, working with other partners across the Indo-Pacific region to support millions of people affected by the catastrophe. We honour the memories of those no longer with us and recognise the survivors and the families of those who were lost.”

According to the statement, what began as an emergency response to a catastrophe has grown into a full-fledged partnership delivering positive outcomes for the people of our region.

“Since 2021, the leaders of our four nations have met annually to drive the Quad’s positive contributions across South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific,” it added.

NIA searches 3 sites in J’khand over terror case

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 31

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has conducted raids at three locations in Chhattrapatti district of Jharkhand in connection with a CPI (Maoist) splinter group conspiracy case.

During the searches conducted on Monday, the Central agency seized several mobile phones and SIM cards.

The raids were part of the NIA probe in the case related to extortion, levy collection and money laundering by members of TSPC, an outfit of the proscribed CPI (Maoist) terror organisation.

Packing, loading process hits toxic waste disposal

AGE CORRESPONDENT
BHOPAL, DEC. 31

The complex and arduous process of packing and loading, in adherence to the protocol, has delayed the removal of toxic waste from Union Carbide plant site here for disposal at Pithapuram incineration facility in Dhar district in Madhya Pradesh, 250 km away, a senior officer said on Tuesday.

“We have to strictly adhere to the protocol assigned for packing and loading of the 337 tons of toxic waste of Union Carbide (in the containers) for shifting them to Pithapuram disposal site. It is very complex and

cumbersome process. The process being followed is of international standard”, gas tragedy relief and rehabilitation department director Swatantra Kumar Singh told this newspaper on Tuesday.

All the toxic wastes have been packed in specially-designed leak-proof bags, and safety of the handlers and public has been ensured during the critical operation, he said.

The workers engaged in packing and loading have been limited to 30-minute shifts each, followed by mandatory rest periods and their health has been monitored regularly.

The packing of the 337 tons of toxic waste has been completed, he said.

‘57 top Maoist leaders in Bastar among 217 ultras killed in 2024’

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
RAIPUR, DEC. 31

In the best ever counterinsurgency campaign in a year in the Leftwing extremism-hit Bastar in Chhattisgarh, security forces have neutralized 57 top Maoist leaders in 2024.

As many as 121 encounters had taken place between Maoists and security forces in Bastar in 2024, in which 217 ultras were killed, the highest number of Naxal fatalities recorded in the conflict zone in the last five years.

Of the slain Maoists, 57 were top Maoist leaders, the highest number of senior leaders killed in a year in Bastar in the four-decade-long history of Leftwing extremism of the region, a senior police officer said on Tuesday.

► **925 NAXALS** were arrested, while 792 ultras surrendered in 2024 in Bastar

► **284 WEAPONS** were seized and 311 number of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were recovered in the region

The slain top Maoist leaders included six special zonal committee (SZC) members who were also members of different state committees of Naxals, 16 divisional committee (DVC) members, 32 area committee members, one deputy commander of a company and two platoon commanders, the data released by the Bastar police on Tuesday said.

While 925 Naxals were arrested, 792 ultras surrendered in 2024 in Bastar.

Similarly, 284 weapons were seized and 311 number of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were recovered in the region in the outgoing year.

The data indicated that the counterinsurgency campaign launched in 2024 had been most successful in the last five years. “Improved resources including weaponry and gadgets, improved operational tactics and intelligence network were the key reasons for the success achieved in the counterinsurgency campaign in 2024”, Bastar inspector-general of police P. Sunderraj told this newspaper on Tuesday.

The effective operational tactics had led to neutralization of the highest number (57) of top Maoist leaders in Bastar in 2024, he said.

Kejriwal enrolls priests in AAP’s Pujari Granthi Samman Yojana

Yojana, the BJP leaders have been hurling abuses at me. My question to them is: Will abusing me benefit the nation? Your party governs 20 states, including Gujarat, where you’ve ruled for 30 years. Why haven’t you honored pujaris and granthis there? Start now—I’ve shown you the way. Instead of abusing me, implement this scheme across your states so that everyone benefits,” said Mr Kejriwal said in another post on X.

Speaking at the registration event, Ms Atishi said, “Today marks the beginning of registrations under this scheme. Mr Kejriwal started the process at the Marghat Wale Baba Hanuman Temple, while registrations for granthis began at Karol Bagh’s Gurudwara Sant Sujan Singh Maharaj.”

The Delhi CM added: “During registration, the granthis blessed Mr Kejriwal and me, saying this is the first time since Maharaja Ranjit Singh that a government has thought of granthis. Pujaris and granthis are with us through life’s joys and sorrows. It is the government’s duty to care for them, which is why this scheme was launched. When the AAP government is re-elected in Delhi, every pujari and granthi will receive ₹18,000 as a monthly honorarium.”

Sarpanch murder: Maha mantri’s aide surrenders

No ‘goonda raj’ will be tolerated in Maha, says Fadnavis

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, DEC. 31

Walmik Karad, who is a close aide of Maharashtra Cabinet minister Dhananjay Munde, on Tuesday surrendered before the criminal investigation department (CID). He has been embroiled in a controversy following the murder of Santosh Deshmukh, a sarpanch in Maharashtra’s Beed district.

The development comes a day after Mr Munde met Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis. After Mr Karad’s surrender, the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) hit out at the ruling Mahayuti government, accusing it of “stage-managing” the entire episode and demanded NCP minister Dhananjay Munde’s resignation.

However, Mr Fadnavis assured that “*gunda raj*” will not be tolerated and nobody will be spared in the Deshmukh murder case.

Deshmukh was allegedly abducted and later brutally murdered after he intervened in hooliganism and extortion bid at a



Walmik Karad surrenders before the crime investigation department in Pune on Tuesday. — *PTI*

wind power plant company namely Avada Green Energy (AVG), at his village Massajog in Kej Tehsil of Beed district of Marathwada region on December 9.

Post this, the murder has caused an uproar in the Marathwada region, especially in Beed district. The Opposition leaders have been claiming that Mr Karad was the orchestrator of the murder.

Although four persons have been arrested in this case, Mr Karad, who has been named as an accused in a related case of extortion, was still at large.

Before surrendering in the CID office in Pune, Mr

‘187 of 243 violent cases in N-E took place in Manipur’

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 31

Manipur, which has been witnessing prolonged ethnic violence between the Meitei and Kuki communities, accounted for about 77 per cent of the total violence in the entire northeastern region in 2023, the Union home ministry annual report said.

According to the report, the north-eastern state Manipur witnessed an increase in violent incidents, owing to the prevailing ethnic strife in 2023 and the resultant increase in the casualties of civilians and security forces personnel, as compared to 2022.

Among the total 243 violent incidents occurred in the Northeast, 187 alone took place in Manipur, the report said.

The counter-insurgency operations in Manipur resulted in the killing of 33 and arrest of 184 insurgents, besides the recovery of 49 weapons.

Further, 80 cadres of insurgent outfits surrendered with 31 arms.

Large-scale ethnic violence erupted between the Meitei and Kuki communities in Manipur on May

► **THE COUNTER-insurgency operations in Manipur resulted in the killing of 33 and arrest of 184 insurgents, besides the recovery of 49 weapons**

3, 2023. The violence resulted in numerous casualties, injuries, and incidents of arson.

Though the issue of violence primarily relates to the maintenance of public order—a state subject — the Central government has been consistently extending its support, as required by the state government.

The report also said the Central government took a series of immediate and sustained actions to handle the situation. An immediate action was initiated by engaging with top officials of Manipur, progressively deploying additional companies of Central Armed Police Forces, Army and Assam Rifles columns, helicopters and drones, and implementing a unified command system.

The first bout of the ethnic violence between the majority Meiteis and tribal Kukis was witnessed in May 2023.

Odisha vigilance dept unearthed ₹131cr in DA cases in 2024

AGE CORRESPONDENT
BHUBANESWAR, DEC. 31

The Odisha vigilance department has taken significant strides in its anti-corruption efforts in 2024, and has registered over 200 criminal cases and apprehended 181 individuals, including government officials and officers, for their involvement in corrupt and disproportionate assets (DA) cases.

According to a release by the agency, charges have been filed against 50 Class-I officers, including six chief engineers, a joint commissioner of excise, a deputy director of fisheries, two assistant commissioners of CT & GST, a jail superintendent, a sub-collector, two tahasildars, and two block development officers (BDOs), among others.

The department registered 60 disproportionate assets cases in 2024, unearthing assets worth over ₹131 crore.

It also intensified its crackdown on bribery, registering 96 trap cases and apprehending 115 individuals, including 99 government officers, for accepting bribes totaling ₹19.25 lakh.

Mahapanchayat on MSP Jan. 4

► **Continued from Page 1** that a unanimous decision has also been reached by the farmer outfits, Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and Kisan Majdoor Morcha, to hold the “kisan mahapanchayat” as a mark of protest against the Centre in support of their demands.

“We are expecting a large number of farmers from several states at the mahapanchayat,” he added.

In the apex court, Punjab advocate-general Gurminder Singh said that “as per the negotiators, there is a proposal given by the farmers to the Central government that in case they get an invite for a talk, Mr Dallewail is ready to take medical help as desired... Therefore, the state government is seeking some more time and to work positively towards compliance of the directions.”

The bench said: “We will not comment on what’s going on as far as negotiations or your law and order is concerned. If something happens that is acceptable to both sides and all stakeholders concerned, we will be equally happy. At the moment, we are only

concerned with the compliance of our orders. If you want more time, we in peculiar circumstances are inclined to grant you some time.”

Mr Singh agreed with the bench on the point that no comments should be made on the negotiations at this stage and sought some time.

Solicitor-general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre and Haryana government, said he did not have any instructions on this issue.

The Punjab A-G said the intervenors and negotiators had tried complying with the court directives by engaging with the farmers in a dialogue. Additionally, the government mobilised 7,000 personnel at the protest site, but on December 30, a call for Punjab bandh was called by other farmer organisations, hindering its efforts, he said.

The bench recorded the submissions and posted the matter on January 2, 2025, for the compliance of its order on the shifting of Mr Dallewail to a hospital. “We are inclined to accept the request to afford some more time for compliance with the directions

issued by the court,” the bench said.

The Punjab chief secretary and director-general of police were directed to continue to appear in person virtually during the hearing.

On December 28, the top court came down heavily on the Punjab government for not moving Mr Dallewail to a hospital even as it doubted the intention of the agitating farmers for resisting the availability of medical aid to their septuagenarian leader.

The Punjab government said it faced huge resistance from the protesting farmers who had encircled Mr Dallewail and prevented him from being taken to a hospital. The top court blamed the Punjab government for allowing the situation to aggravate and not doing enough to contain the situation.

The apex court remarked that the farmer leaders who did not allow Mr Dallewail to be taken to a hospital were involved in the criminal offence of abetment to suicide. On December 20, the top court put the onus on Punjab government officials and doctors to decide on Mr Dallewail’s hospitalisation.

THE ASIAN AGE

1 JANUARY 2025

India, most of all, needs harmony in New Year

As the world leaves behind a parlous 2024 there is no end in sight yet of two major wars in Ukraine and around the Gaza Strip and civil wars are raging in Somalia, Haiti, Myanmar and many other countries, besides an uprising in Bangladesh, with no sign of the issues being resolved. The eternal optimists can, however, hope that the chronological convenience of turning the Gregorian calendar to January 2025 will bring some sense to those involved that violence leads to nothing except that it only begets more violence. Making 2024 such a tumultuous year beyond the wars and conflicts was the fact that two billion people, around a quarter of the world's population, went to polling booths to register their choice. Their disenchantment with the status quo saw many ruling parties come tumbling down as in the UK and the United States and many other countries where the desire for change dominated. Significantly, the BJP led-NDA alliance survived the global storm that felled political parties, but with reduced numbers and without a majority of its own for the BJP. That brought India back to a time of coalitions with a chastened Prime Minister having to bow to alliance dharma and make mellow his party's stance on many issues.

The year post-polls, however, saw more political wrangling with harmony distinctly lacking as the Winter Session of Parliament was ruled by a stalemate between a protesting Opposition and a government that saw an opportunity in recalling the past with its own narratives on historical figures as the debate on the Constitution in its platinum jubilee year became an exception to the regular bedlam in the House.

In these contentious times in which polarisation has become the leading characteristic of democracies, harmony is an elusive concept, but one that must be sought at least by the government and the Opposition if a major reform to the electoral process like the "One Nation One Election" must stand any chance of triggering an open debate and a broad consensus.

Considering the rulers and the Opposition could not be together even at the funeral of a two-term Prime Minister of this millennium in Manmohan Singh, harmony seems a concept too far for a fractured polity in a pluralist society. Apart from the renowned economist who became an accidental PM, the country saw many a luminary of the arts like Shyam Benegal and a gem of a progressive titan of industry in Ratan Tata depart.

The world of sport remained extremely competitive and there too it was individuals like the chess champions D. Gukesh and Koneru Humpy, the Olympic twin bronze medallist Manu Bhaker and the peerless fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah who shone. As far as team games went, it wasn't the best of years even if Team India did break a long ICC trophy drought by winning the T20 World Cup.

The ineffectual performances in team sports may be taken to represent Indians' difficulties in staying together amicably. Togetherness has goodness in it, so goes the saying, and it might mean something as the world prepares for what could be a turbulent Trump year with his promised tariff wars adding another dimension to the suffering caused by economic downturns and climate change catastrophes.

Talking of the economy, there is much to do as the rulers could not have missed the signs of a dip in the last couple of quarters in the world's fastest growing large one. Even bickering Indians must see a need for growth for which consumption must rise too. All is not well is the message that 2024 conveyed. Hopefully, the New Year will be better for all.

Talk to farmers, find solution

With the agitating farmers communicating to the Supreme Court that their leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal will call off his indefinite hunger strike if the Union government invited them to a discussion on their long-pending agenda, it is now up to the government to take the initiative for talks and pave the way towards ending a year-long agitation.

The government should not ideally have a quarrel with the farmers' demands which include a legal guarantee for minimum support price for crops, debt relief and withdrawal of cases lodged against farmers during the earlier edition of the agitation. In December 2021, the then NDA government had actually assured them that steps would be taken towards their fulfilment after repealing the three controversial farm laws. From Prime Minister Narendra Modi who promised to double farmer income to the finance minister who listed various measures for farmers in the annual Budget, the theme of farmer welfare has never gone missing from the government's agenda.

It is a shame, therefore, that the farmers have been agitating on the Punjab-Haryana border for almost a year now over these issues that are in fact critical to their survival. The government announces MSP ahead of every crop season but at present is not under an obligation to do so. The farmers argue that a legal framework on MSP would alleviate their fears and introduce a sense of surety. The demand for debt relief should cost the exchequer but history has shown that such pro-farmer measures will introduce more vibrancy in the rural economy which will have a cascading effect on other sectors.

It is a paradox that the major mediator in this agitation is the Supreme Court of India while the decision should ideally be the result of a direct conversation between the farmers and the government. The farmers' group has now offered the government an opportunity to play its legitimate role and it must honour this trust.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



As unfilled posts add to suspense, decoding Delhi's latest babu jigsaw

The recent secretary-level reshuffle in New Delhi left some scratching their heads yet again. Like an unsolvable jigsaw puzzle, the logic behind these moves remains a closely guarded secret. But, for now, let's try to decode at least a few of these postings.

First up is the department of personnel and training (DoPT), which handles the government's personnel affairs. For the third time in a year, the DoPT has a new secretary, with Rachna Shah, a 1991 Kerala cadre officer stepping in after a prolonged vacancy. Notably, the baton remains with a woman officer, continuing a trend. Ms Shah replaces Radha S. Chauhan, while Manisha Saxena recently took over as establishment officer, and Kavita Singh handles crucial ACC matters in the Cabinet secretariat. Coincidence? Hardly, say sources. The system seems designed to prevent leaks and surprises. If all goes smoothly, Ms Shah may stay till her retirement in November 2027, promising some much-needed stability at the DoPT.

Over at the department of revenue, the reshuffle sparked buzz with 1992 batch IAS officer Arunish Chawla's appointment. Taking over from Sanjay Malhotra, now RBI governor, Mr Chawla faces the Herculean task of managing key portfolios like CBDT, CBIC, and the Enforcement Directorate (ED). His stint in pharmaceuticals seems to have been a brief stopover, and he's now moved to the high-stakes North Block while still holding charge

of the ministry of culture. Speaking of culture, it's been on an upward trajectory, gaining significant prominence. How Mr Chawla balances these dual responsibilities will be worth watching.

As for the ministry of culture, the suspense over who will fill Mr Chawla's shoes adds an extra layer of intrigue. With the Prime Minister's Office playing its cards close to the chest, it's a game of wait-and-watch.

In the end, these reshuffles are a masterclass in controlled chaos. For us, mere mortals, deciphering the method in this madness remains an engaging, if baffling, pastime.

WHY DID PROMISING DARBHANGA COP OFFER HER RESIGNATION?

Bureaucracy often thrives on opacity, but every so often, a story comes along that is intriguing enough to make us wonder what's happening behind the scenes. The case of Kamya Misra, a promising young IPS officer from the 2019 batch, is one such mystery.

Ms Misra, who recently resigned from her post as the rural superintendent of police (SP) in Darbhanga, citing personal reasons, found her resignation unceremoniously rejected by the Bihar government. Instead, she's been granted 180 days of leave starting November 2024 and is currently cooling her heels at the Bihar police headquarters, awaiting a fresh posting. Reshuffles are routine in police services, but her case feels any-

thing but ordinary.

Her husband, Avdhesh Saroj Dixit, also from the 2019 batch, is currently the SP of Gopalganj, having previously served as the City SP in Muzaffarpur. The duo, who married in 2021, is highly regarded in bureaucratic circles. So why would an officer like Ms Misra, respected and reportedly effective, tender her resignation? And why would the government so pointedly refuse to let her go?

The timing adds an extra layer of intrigue. Could this be linked to Bihar's political climate, with state elections potentially on the horizon? Ms Misra's tenure in Darbhanga and her decision to step away could have raised eyebrows, but the government's move to sideline her while keeping her within the system only raises more questions. Is there a larger BJP-Nitish Kumar political calculus at play here? Or does this point to internal administrative dynamics that we can only guess at? Whatever the reason, one thing is clear — as the political temperature in the state rises, stories like this remind us of the fine balance between governance and politics in India's bureaucracy. For now, though, Kamya Misra's 180-day hiatus leaves us wondering: What's next in this unfolding drama?

CUT THE CLUTTER: CABINET SECY PUSHES FOR FAST GOVERNANCE

Continuing from where he left off last month,

Cabinet Secretary T.V. Somanathan has called out ministries for ignoring a two-year-old directive to limit decision-making to four layers. In a no-nonsense letter, he pointed out that this non-compliance is causing unnecessary delays, undermining the government's push for reforms. He is clearly a man on a mission.

The directive aims to streamline processes by creating a leaner, flatter structure. Mr Somanathan wants special, additional, and joint secretaries to operate as independent bureau heads, cutting out extra layers that slow things down. His message was clear: "De-layering" isn't just a buzzword; it's about speeding up decisions and improving efficiency.

He also reminded secretaries to personally ensure these changes are implemented, stressing that responsive, transparent governance depends on it.

Adding to this, the Cabinet secretary chimed in with a reminder to keep communication short and sweet. He asked secretaries to send concise monthly updates — just one or two pages — highlighting key issues and delays. The message? Less bureaucracy, more action.

Love them, hate them, ignore them at national peril, is the babu guarantee and Dilip's belief. Share significant babu escapades dilipcherian@hotmail.com.

Subhani



Will a year of global wars set off more 2025 churn?



Sunanda K. Datta-Ray

Reflections

The world was at war. The world was on the move. With crooks and commun everywhere, Indians never knew when the telephone rang whether it was a genuine caller or a trickster threatening to disconnect the line or freeze your bank account unless paid off.

Committed to "Make America Great Again", the century's comeback kid was on the prowl. US President-elect Donald Trump threatened India with a trade war, and Panama with seizure of the Canal. Controlling Greenland was an "absolute necessity", he declared.

Canada and Mexico should become US states if they want to continue enjoying lavish subsidies. Mr Trump advised Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to make a deal with Russia's President Vladimir Putin and promised to pardon Republican rioters who stormed the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, in an attempt to prevent US President Joe Biden being sworn in. He warned of sweeping changes in immigration rules, massive deportations and the end of the constitutionally guaranteed birthright citizenship in America.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterated that he had told Mr Putin both "directly and publicly" that "this is not an era of war". Mr Putin attacked fresh targets in Ukraine. Having pulverised Gaza, Israel began bombing Syria. The Houthis rebels targeting Tel Aviv didn't get Mr Modi's message either. Fighting continued in Sudan, Yemen and Myanmar. Dhaka demanded that India hand over former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed to Bangladesh justice. The International Criminal Court sought the arrest of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as well as some Hamas leaders.

Amidst trade and tribal

wars, civil and uncivil wars, cyber wars, wars to unite and to secede, India often seemed to be at war with Indians. Hostilities erupted in Parliament, the Jawaharlal Nehru University campus and Chhattisgarh's jungles. Jammu and Kashmir was split and demoted. Manipur ran with blood. Ominous rumbles from distant Australia, the United States, and, most persistently, Canada, suggested that India was waging its domestic wars on foreign soil.

Britain's National Investigation Agency arrested Inderpal Singh Gaba, claiming the Sikh had vandalised India's flag. In contrast to the stalemate in investigating the murder of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, allegedly a Khalistan Tiger Force militant, the UK NIA offered to share the Gaba case file with India.

Hindus challenged the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, right, left and centre. Muslims would soon be the majority, predicted Kolkata's mayor, Firdad Hakim. Mohan Bhagwat, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief, urged Hindus to be more inclusive. Mr Modi upheld his "One Nation, One Election" law as the formula for unity.

The rupee fell to its lowest ever against the almighty dollar. The United States narrowly escaped a total government shutdown. Rich Indians didn't stop getting richer. As wealth inequality widened with one per cent of Indians owning 58 per cent of the nation's wealth, while the richest 10 per cent owned 80 per cent, the former Reserve Bank governor, Raghuram Rajan, dismissed as a "pie in the sky" a proposal by Thomas Piketty, the French author of *Capital in the Twenty-first Century*, to levy an annual two per cent wealth tax on individuals with assets exceeding \$1.18 million (Rs 100 million) and a 33 per cent inheritance tax on properties of similar

Donald Trump isn't the only world leader anxious to pull up the drawbridge against the influx of (mainly Asian) immigrants. Anti-foreigner sentiment is hardening in Germany, where elections are due in February...

value. The "wealthy always have a way around it (taxes)", he said. Moreover, taxing penalises success: India needs to optimise resource allocation.

India protested when a now-deleted Facebook post by a key aide of Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, chief adviser to the Bangladesh government, demanded that it should recognise the uprising that forced Sheikh Hasina to flee to India. She and Bashar al-Assad, Syria's accidental ruler who was hailed as "the hope of the masses", when his older brother died in a car crash, are in similar boats. Lurking in the Kremlin, Mr Assad must be as much of an embarrassment for Mr Putin as Sheikh Hasina probably is for Mr Modi. A triumphant homecoming is unlikely for either. Even if Bangladesh holds elections, her Awami League may not be allowed to participate.

Mr Assad's alleged misdeeds — repression, prison brutality, chemical warfare — were trumpeted worldwide by US publicists but the crimes that Sheikh Hasina apparently committed or condoned during two stints in office were unknown until the five-member commission of inquiry under a retired Supreme Court judge which Mr Yunus had appointed released its interim report, "Unfolding the Truth". Reporting more than 3,500 enforced disappearances, it hinted at some Indian collusion.

The report charged several high-ranking former military and police officers in Sheikh Hasina's entourage with authoritarianism, human rights abuse, rampant corruption, mass murder and crimes against humanity. The ousted regime denied all allegations. So did Sheikh Hasina's niece, Tulip Siddiq, a Labour member of

Britain's Parliament and economic secretary to the Treasury, whose ministerial duties include tackling financial corruption. Backing her rejection of the charge of embezzling billions of dollars during Bangladesh's 2013 purchase of a Russian nuclear power plant, Britain's Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer, expressed his full confidence in Ms Siddiq who continues to handle anti-corruption issues.

Donald Trump isn't the only world leader anxious to pull up the drawbridge against the influx of (mainly Asian) immigrants. Anti-foreigner sentiment is hardening in Germany, where elections are due in February, after the Magdeburg tragedy when a Saudi-born psychiatrist who has lived in Germany for nearly two decades mowed down Christmas market shoppers, killing five persons, including a toddler, and injuring over 200 others. Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden agreed to strengthen cooperation in deporting illegal migrants.

Although the Starmer government cancelled its predecessor's plot to send immigrants to Rwanda for vetting, British public opinion was far from happy. A Facebook post complained that over 12 million immigrants have entered Britain since 1997, 80 per cent of whom are totally dependent on welfare. Their upkeep adds up to nearly "a staggering" £500 billion.

Britain's Prince Andrew hurtled from one scandal to another when MIS identified a friend of his as a Chinese spy and banished him from the UK. It was reported the prince might move to an opulent palace in West Asia. As Britain's former trade envoy and patron of the Middle East Association, he knows the region well.

As Mr Biden commuted the sentences of 37 out of 40 prisoners on death row, Mr Trump vowed to execute "rapists, murderers, and monsters". The world is waiting now to see where he will strike next in the holy jubilee year that Pope Francis launched on Christmas Eve while Hindu sadhus squabbled over who owns India.

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

LETTERS

NO MEMORIAL

The news of post-cremation politics has wasted enough space of the newspapers of the nation. Whatever be the logic put forward by both the parties, the point to be taken home for future is that there should be no change from the precedent set based on approval of the Union Cabinet on May 16, 2013, for construction of Rashtriya Smriti Sthal, a common memorial site near Ekta Sthal in New Delhi. In fact, why not dispense with this practice altogether? It will put every citizen at par with each other and also save land and environment for humanity.

Col R.S. Narula (retd)
Patiala, Punjab

MANMOHAN BHAKTS

THERE is no way one can respect or disrespect a person once he or she has passed away. The BJP have unnecessarily waded into the question of Rahul Gandhi's impropriety of flying to Vietnam for whatever reason. Life is fast and the mourning period for any loved ones is observed in only a few countries. In India it is a custom to stop one's routine and only receive condolences from visitors. Some make a big show of their affection even if they have not been kind to the departed soul during the individual's life time. Better to take care of the ill person when the individual is living rather than weep torrents once he is no more.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

DESI POWER

FIVE MILLION Indian Americans have become one of the most influential communities in US society. While they may be just 1.5 per cent of the US population, they contribute \$300 billion in tax revenues annually and roughly \$450 billion in annual spending and they have been co-founders of 10 per cent of the unicorns there. Sixteen out of 500 Fortune 500 companies are currently led by people of Indian origins. Needless to mention that they are top participants in politics, economic growth and technology. It has been a two-way street where both parties have benefited. Mr Donald Trump must clearly spell out his government's stand on this to clear all the air as the US can only ignore Indians at their own peril.

Bal Govind
Noida, UP

SHORT TAKES

FRANCE REPORTS
BIRD FLU ON TWO
POULTRY FARMS

Paris, Dec. 31: France has confirmed bird flu outbreaks on two poultry farms, just days after being officially declared free of the virus, the agriculture ministry said.

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), commonly called bird flu, has spread across Europe in a seasonal wave linked to migrating birds.

However, the impact has been less severe in Europe than in the United States, where flock losses have led to record egg prices and the virus has been transmitted to both cattle and humans.

AZERI LEADER KIN
HELD IN GREECE
DRUGS BUST

Athens, Dec. 31: A cousin of Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev, a British-Azeri DJ, has been arrested in a drug raid at a party near Athens, Greek police said on Tuesday.

Police said they arrested 13 people on Monday at a luxury villa in the town of Kalyvia.

They gave no names but media reports said Izzat Khanim Javadova, known as Mikaela Jav, was among those arrested from the spot.

Asked about the reports, a police source, who refused to be identified by name, confirmed it was her, adding that she "organised the party".

ONE DEAD AFTER
SHIP SINKS OFF
PHILIPPINES

Manila, Dec. 31: A cement-laden cargo ship sank in choppy waters in the central Philippines, leaving one crew member dead and another missing, the Coast Guard said.

The Philippine-flagged Jerlyn Kathness was taken down by big waves in the San Bernardino Strait off the island of Samar on Monday, Coast Guard station commander Bryhl Amay told AFP.

Passing vessels plucked 12 of the cargo ship's 15 crew members out of the stormy sea, while another managed to swim ashore to the tiny island of San Juan.

MEXICO RECOVERS
31 BODIES FROM
COVERT GRAVES

Mexico City, Dec. 31: Mexican authorities said they recovered a total of 31 bodies from pits in a southeastern state plagued by cartel violence since they began excavating the improvised graves at the weekend.

Chiapas State Governor Eduardo Ramirez announced an operation to restore stability to Frailesca, where drug cartels are involved in a turf war.

"As of today, we have found a total of 25 clandestine graves, 31 bodies found, 29 of them male and two female," said Jorge Luis Llaven, the state prosecutor of Chiapas in a statement.

INMATE's DEATH:
NY GOVERNOR
ORDERS REFORMS

New York, Dec. 31: New York's governor ordered prison reforms and began the process of firing corrections officers who earlier this month beat a restrained Black inmate who died a few hours later.

Kathy Hochul's office said in a written statement that she visited the Marcy Correctional Facility in central New York, where inmate Robert Brooks' beating was captured on body-worn cameras.

Video of the violence was released last week by the state's attorney general, who is investigating Brooks' death. Hochul met with some inmates.

BBC CELEBRATES
100 YEARS OF
SAILOR FORECAST

London, Dec. 31: The BBC on Wednesday celebrates 100 years of a weather forecast for sailors in British waters. The Shipping Forecast, providing predictions on expected wind speeds, sea state, weather and visibility, began as a vital service to sailors and sea captains.

Modern seafarers can now rely on sophisticated forecasting technology but the calm, rhythmic delivery of the forecast by one of BBC Radio 4's silky-voiced continuity announcers has turned the forecast into something of a beloved British institution.

Chinese hackers
accessed docus in
treasury dept: US

Washington, Dec. 31: Chinese hackers remotely accessed several US treasury department workstations and unclassified documents after compromising a third-party software service provider, the agency said on Monday.

The department did not provide details on how many workstations had been accessed or what sort of documents the hackers may have obtained, but it said in a letter to lawmakers revealing the breach that "at this time there is no evidence indicating the threat actor has continued access to treasury information".

The hack was being investigated as a "major cybersecurity incident", it added. "Treasury takes very seriously all threats against our systems, and the data it holds," a department spokesperson said in a separate statement.

"Over the last four years, treasury has significantly bolstered its cyber defence, and we will continue to work with both private and public sector partners to protect our financial system from threat actors."

In Beijing, a foreign ministry spokesperson gave China's standard response to hacking allegations. "We have repeatedly stated our position on such



We have repeatedly stated our position on such groundless accusations that lack evidence. China consistently opposes all forms of hacking, and we are even more opposed to the dissemination of false information against China for political purposes.

— MAO NING
China's foreign ministry
spokesperson

groundless accusations that lack evidence," Mao Ning said. "China consistently opposes all forms of hacking, and we are even more opposed to the dissemination of false information against China for political purposes."

"The incident comes as US officials are continuing to grapple with the fallout of a massive Chinese cyberespionage campaign known as Salt Typhoon that gave officials in Beijing access to private texts and phone conversations.

France says it bombed
IS positions in Syria

Paris, Dec. 31: French aircraft have bombed Islamic State positions in Syria, defence minister Sebastien Lecornu said on Tuesday, in its first such strike on the country's soil since the fall of Bashar al-Assad.

"Our armed forces remain engaged in battling terrorism in the Levant," Lecornu wrote on X while on a New Year visit to French UN peacekeepers in Lebanon.

Israel's ambassador to the United Nations on Monday issued what he called a final warning to Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis militants to halt missile attacks on Israel, saying they risked the same "miserable fate" as Hamas, Hezbollah and Syria's Bashar al-Assad if they persisted.

The ambassador, Danny

● ISRAEL'S AMBASSADOR to the United Nations on Monday issued what he called a final warning to Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis militants to halt missile attacks on Israel, saying they risked the same "miserable fate" as Hamas, Hezbollah and Syria's Bashar al-Assad if they persisted.

Danon, also warned Tehran that Israel has the ability to strike any target in the Middle East, including in Iran. He added that Israel would not tolerate attacks by Iranian proxies. "On Sunday, French air assets carried out targeted strikes against Daesh on Syrian soil," he added, using the Arabic name for IS. The defence ministry

Kyiv navy destroys Moscow copter

Kyiv, Dec. 31: Ukrainian military intelligence said on Tuesday one of its naval drones had destroyed a Russian helicopter and damaged another one in the Black Sea.

The Ukrainian military said on Tuesday its forces had also hit a Russian oil depot in the Smolensk region, setting fire to tanks storing oil products.

On the other hand, Russia launched an aerial attack on Ukraine on Tuesday, striking the capital and other regions with multiple missiles and drones. Ukraine's air force reported a ballistic missile threat at 3:00 am (0100 GMT), with at least two explosions heard in Kyiv minutes later. Another missile alert was issued at 8:00 am followed by at least one explosion in the city.

RUSSIAN FORCES ADVANCED NEARLY
4,000 SQ KM IN UKRAINE IN 2024

Paris, Dec. 31: Russian forces advanced by 3,985 square km (1,539 square miles) in Ukraine in 2024, seven times more than in 2023, according to an AFP analysis of data from the US-based Institute for the Study of War (ISW).

Much of the Russian gains came in the autumn, as they took 610 square km in October and 725 square km in November.

Missile debris fell in the Darnytskyi district of the capital with no reports of casualties or damage.

In a battle near Cape Tarkhankut on Crimea's west coast on Tuesday, a

told AFP that France's Rafale fighter jets and US-made Reaper drones "dropped a total of seven bombs on two military targets belonging to Daesh in central Syria".

France has belonged to the Inherent Resolve international coalition against IS since 2014 for Iraq and 2015 for Syria.

French troops involved in the operations are based in the region, including in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

As Assad's fall to a shock offensive by Syrian rebels led by a radical Sunni group rapidly reshapes the country, observers fear space could be left for IS to regather its strength.

The group has survived in Iraq and Syria despite the destruction of its caliphate that lasted from 2014-19. — Agencies

Kyiv navy destroys Moscow copter

EMERGENCY
LANDING: SWISS
CREW DIES

Geneva, Dec. 31: A Swiss International Air Lines cabin crew member on an aeroplane forced to make an emergency landing has died.

The Airbus A220-300 jet, with 74 passengers and five crew on board, was flying from Bucharest to Zurich on December 23 when it had to land in Graz, Austria after engine problems occurred and smoke filled the cockpit and cabin. The plane landed safely.

"We must report, with the deepest of sorrow and regret, that our young colleague died in the hospital in Graz," Swiss said. — AFP

drone had downed an air target. Reuters could not verify the report.

There was no comment from Moscow on the helicopter. Russia's defence ministry said on Telegram its Black Sea Fleet destroyed eight unmanned drone vessels.

The downing of a Russian helicopter by a Ukrainian naval drone was also reported by the prominent Russian military blogger, Voennoy Osvedomitel. The GUR said a second Russian helicopter managed to get to the airfield after it was damaged in the attack.

In footage released by GUR, a helicopter flying over water could be seen targeted by several projectiles. The aircraft is filmed falling down after the attack. — Agencies

S. Korea court issues arrest
warrant for impeached Prez

Korea's acting President Choi to appoint 2 Constitutional Court justices

Seoul, Dec. 31: A South Korean court has issued an arrest warrant for suspended President Yoon Suk Yeol, investigators said on Tuesday, prompting hundreds of supporters to gather at the gates of his private residence.

South Korea's acting President Choi Sang-mok said on Tuesday he would immediately move to fill vacancies on the Constitutional Court in an effort to restore stability after the impeachment of two of his predecessors this month triggered political turmoil. Choi said he would also appoint a third Constitutional Court justice when ruling and opposition parties can agree on nominating a candidate.

Investigators probing Yoon over his December 3 declaration of martial law requested the warrant after he failed to report for questioning a third time.

Crowds gathered outside his home Tuesday wielding placards and South Korean flags, chanting: "Martial law legal! Impeachment invalid!"

"The arrest warrant and search warrant... were issued this morning," the Joint Investigation Headquarters managing the probe into Yoon said.

Yoon's legal team described the arrest order as

"illegal and invalid" and filed an injunction to nullify it. It is the first time in the country's history that a sitting president has faced an arrest warrant.

"I came out here because I was shocked and horrified that they're trying to arrest the president," said Song Mi-ja, a pro-Yoon protester. "The martial law was not an insurrection, what they're trying to do now is one," she told AFP.

Police were sent to the area in large numbers and could be seen shouting at demonstrators to keep in line, but a route in and out of Yoon's residence remained clear.

Yoon has been stripped of his presidential duties by Parliament and faces criminal charges of insurrection, which could result in life imprisonment or even the death penalty.

"The arrest warrant and search and seizure warrant issued at the request of an agency without investigative authority are illegal and invalid," his lawyer Yoon Kab-keun said in a statement.

He said his client was not guilty of insurrection, adding that there was no intention of disrupting "the constitutional order" or to stage "an uprising".

But a Corruption Investigation Office official



Investigators at the scene where a Jeju Air Boeing 737-800 aircraft crashed and burst into flames at Muan International Airport in Muan, in South Korea, on Tuesday. — AFP

said there was "sufficient probable cause" to suspect Yoon commissioned a crime. The warrant will be valid until Monday, the official told reporters, and if Yoon is detained he would likely be held at the Seoul detention centre.

"There is a concern that the individual may refuse to comply with summons without justifiable reasons," they said. The Presidential Security Service (PSS) guarding Yoon have previously refused to comply with search warrants. — Agencies

U.S., BOEING INVESTIGATORS EXAMINE
SITE OF SOUTH KOREAN PLANE CRASH

Seoul, Dec. 31: A team of US investigators, including representatives from Boeing have examined the site of a plane crash that killed 179 people in South Korea while authorities were conducting safety inspections on all Boeing 737-800 aircraft operated by the country's airlines.

The South Korean government has launched safety inspections on all

the 101 Boeing 737-800s in the country. The transport ministry said authorities are looking at maintenance and operation records.

The ministry said that a delegation of eight US investigators — one from the Federal Aviation Administration, three from National Transportation Safety Board and four from Boeing — made an on-site visit. — AP

Xi: Apply 'more proactive'
macroeconomic policies

Beijing, Dec. 31: President Xi Jinping said China will put in place "more proactive" macroeconomic policies next year, state media reported, as he addressed a top political advisory body on Tuesday.

China's factory activity expanded at a slower pace in December, official data showed on Tuesday, despite recent stimulus measures and in the face of increasing trade risks.

The Purchasing Managers' Index, based on a survey of factory managers, slipped to 50.1 in December from 50.3 the previous month, the National Bureau of Statistics said on Tuesday.

The country has struggled this year to climb out of a slump fuelled by a property market crisis, weak consumption and soaring government debt.

Beijing has unveiled a string of aggressive measures in recent months aimed at bolstering growth.

But economists have warned that more direct fiscal stimulus aimed at shoring up domestic consumption is needed to restore full health in China's economy. "We must... further comprehensively deepen reform, expand high-level opening up, better coordinate development and security, (and) implement more proactive and effective macroeconomic policies," said Xi.

Later, in a televised speech addressed to the nation, Xi admitted there were roadblocks ahead. "The current economic operation faces some new situations, challenges from the uncertainty of the external environment, and pressure of transformation from old drivers of growth into new ones, but these can be overcome through hard work." — AFP



Security personnel stand guard outside the Wuhan Institute of Virology, in China. China has shared the most Covid-19 data and research results in the international community, its foreign ministry said on Tuesday, after the World Health Organisation repeated its call for more information and access. — AFP

China-Russia ties on
right path: Jinping

Beijing, Dec. 31: China and Russia are moving forward hand in hand along the "right path" of non-alliance, non-confrontation and their relations have been advancing towards "higher levels," Chinese President Xi Jinping said on Tuesday in his New Year message to his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.

Xi and Putin exchanged New Year greetings highlighting their burgeoning strategic ties. "In the face of the accelerated transformation unseen in a century and a volatile international landscape, China and Russia always move forward hand in hand along the right path of non-alliance, non-confrontation, and not targeting any third party," Xi said.

Putin in his message said both countries have advanced the Russia-Chi-

na comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era to new heights. "The mutually beneficial cooperation between China's and Russia's economy, trade, energy, transportation, science, and technology is progressing in an orderly manner," he said.

Both leaders exchanged greetings ahead of the January 20 swearing-in of President-elect Donald Trump who threatened to impose punitive tariffs on Chinese exports to the US besides hardening American policy towards China and hinted at a strategic shift of warming up to Putin to end the Ukraine war. Since taking power in 2012, Xi has elevated China's ties with Russia to build strategic alliances to ward off adversity towards China in the US and EU countries. — PTI

WELCOMING | NEW YEAR

2024 will go down as the hottest year on record, with climate-fuelled disasters

World greets 2025 after Olympics, turmoil, Trump

Sydney, Dec. 31: Crowds will marvel at fireworks and toast champagne to greet 2025 on Tuesday, waving goodbye to a year that brought Olympic glory, a dramatic Donald Trump return and turmoil in the Middle East and Ukraine.

It is all but certain that 2024 will go down as the hottest year on record, with climate-fuelled disasters wreaking havoc from the plains of Europe to the Kathmandu Valley.

As New Year's Eve parties kicked into gear along Australia's picturesque

Sydney Harbour on Tuesday afternoon, many revellers were relieved to see the past 12 months in the rearview mirror.

"It would be nice for the world if it all sort of fixed itself, sorted itself out," insurance worker Stuart Edwards, 32, told AFP.

The self-proclaimed "New Year's capital of the world" will spray nine tonnes of fireworks from its famed Opera House and Harbour Bridge at midnight. "Just to see all the beautiful colours and enjoy being in this situation



with so many people in wonderful Australia," said 71-year-old retired nurse Ruth Rowse.

Taylor Swift brought the curtain down on her Eras tour this year, pygmy hippo Moo Deng went viral

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	78,139.01	-0.14
Nifty 50	23,658.15	0.06
S&P 500*	5,899.05	-0.13
Dollar (₹)	85.61	0.08
Pound Sterling (₹)	107.49	-0.08
Euro (₹)	89.20	-0.06
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	76,499,239	0.31
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	73.98	-0.01
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.759	-0.016
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.521	-0.024

* As of 8:30 PM IST

NSO begins to empanel survey institutions

The Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI) on Tuesday said that the National Statistics Office has initiated the process to empanel survey institutions for conducting sample surveys on socioeconomic indicators. The Survey Wing of the National Statistics Office conducts large scale sample surveys in diverse fields on pan-India basis, a MOSPI statement said.

Indo Farm IPO gets subscribed nearly 6 times

The initial public offer of Indo Farm Equipment got subscribed 17.7 times on the opening day of bidding on Tuesday amid strong investors participation. The category for non-institutional investors got subscribed 28.56 times while retail individual investors part fetched 18.54 times subscription. The company had garnered a little over ₹78 crore from anchor investors.



Cyber attack on IT infrastructure of Thomas Cook

Travel services provider Thomas Cook (India) Tuesday said there has been a cyber attack on its IT infrastructure and it is working with security experts to support its investigation and take remedial action. In a regulatory filing, the company said, "There has been an incident involving a cyber attack on our IT infrastructure." It said it has taken necessary steps to investigate and respond to the incident.

Interest rates of small saving a/cs unchanged

The Central government has kept interest rates on various small savings schemes unchanged for the fourth consecutive quarter, starting January 1, 2025. "The rates for the January- March 2025 period will remain the same as those for the previous quarter. Deposits under the Sukanya Samridhi scheme will continue to earn 8.2 percent interest," a notification said on Tuesday. Rates have remained unchanged for three quarters.

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Sensex, Nifty give 9% returns to investors

M-cap of BSE-listed firms soars by ₹77.66 lakh crore to ₹441.9 lakh crore

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, DEC. 31

The Sensex and Nifty have given annual returns of 8.9 per cent and 9.6 per cent in 2024 respectively compared to 20 per cent profit in 2023. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms soared by ₹77.66 lakh crore to ₹441.9 lakh crore (\$5.16 trillion). For the first time, the market cap crossed the ₹400-lakh crore milestone on April 8, having surpassed ₹300-lakh crore just last year.

The Indian stock market lagged most major global indices in 2024. The US markets stole the show, with the Dow Jones up 14.1 per cent, the S&P 500 soaring 25.2 per cent, and the NASDAQ-100 dominating with a stellar return of 27.6 per cent in 2024. Japan's Nikkei 225 shone with a 20.4 per cent return, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng rebounded sharply with a 17.9 per cent gain, clawing back from its steep 16 per cent drop in 2023.

On January 1, 2024, the BSE Sensex opened flat at 72,240 points and the Nifty at 21741 points but soon

WEALTH CREATION

● The US markets stole the show, with the Dow Jones up 14.1%, the S&P 500 soaring 25.2%, and the NASDAQ-100 dominating with a stellar return of 27.6%.

● Japan's Nikkei 225 shone with a 20.4% return, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng rebounded sharply with a 17.9% gain, clawing back from its steep 16% drop in 2023.

● European indices trailed behind, with the Euro Stoxx adding 6.5% and the UK FTSE increasing by 5.4%.

● Consumer durables, power, capital goods, auto, IT contributed to the broad-based rally, reinforcing the market's bullish momentum.

BROADER MARKETS SIGNIFICANTLY OUTPACED BENCHMARKS, BSE MIDCAP 100 AND BSE SMALLCAP 100 POST STELLAR RETURNS OF 25.8% AND 29%, RESPECTIVELY

INDIAN ECONOMY continues to be a 'star performing' economy compared to other emerging markets. We firmly believe it will likely continue its growth momentum in 2025 and remain the land of stability against the backdrop of a volatile global economy.

AXIS SECURITIES said in Yearly Technical Outlook for 2025.

touched an all-time high on January 15 with Sensex at 73,327 points and Nifty at 22,097. Since then the markets experienced a remarkable upswing.

The Sensex touched an all time high of 85,978 on Sept. 27 and the Nifty at 26,277.35. Profit-taking triggered a sharp correction of 11 per cent (9,176 points) till November. Consumer

power, capital goods, auto, and IT contributed to the rally. The BSE Midcap and Smallcap indices posted impressive gains of 25.8 per cent and 29 per cent, respectively.

FIIs sold equities worth ₹1.19 lakh cr but buying by domestic institutional investors and SIPs, which rose from ₹18,838 cr in Jan. to ₹25,320 cr in Dec., stabilised the market.

"Nifty 50 earnings per share is projected to grow by 7.6 per cent in FY25, with 13.7 per cent growth expected in FY26. This will be supported by the real estate cycle, private capex recovery, and strong construction. Risks include global macro uncertainties, inflation, and potential earnings downgrades," said an Axis Securities report.

Gold investments fetch 23% gains, trend likely to continue

New Delhi, Dec. 31: Gold, a safe-haven bet, is likely to continue its record-smashing journey in the New Year, rising to ₹85,000 per 10 grams and even the ₹90,000-level in domestic markets if geopolitical tensions and global economic uncertainties continue.

Also aiding the run is a dovish tilt in monetary policy and buying by central banks, but if the geopolitical crisis eases, the precious metal will turn weak on depreciating rupee.

Gold price is hovering at ₹79,350 per 10 grams in spot markets at present, and ₹76,600 per 10 grams in futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).

The precious metal capped off 2024 on a strong note with its best performance, notching 23 per cent returns in the domestic markets.

The yellow metal hit an all-time high of ₹82,400

APPRECIATING VALUE

- Gold price is hovering at ₹79,350 per 10 grams in spot markets.
- Gold going at ₹76,600 per 10 grams in futures.
- Yellow metal hit all-time high of ₹82,400 per 10 grams on October 30 this year.
- Silver mirrored this stellar performance with a 30 per cent gain.
- Experts believe that precious metals will remain strong performers in 2025.

per 10 grams on October 30 this year. Silver mirrored this stellar performance with a 30 per cent gain, surpassing the ₹1 lakh level per kg level.

Globally, Comex gold futures started the year at around ₹2,062 per ounce and rallied to a peak of ₹2,790 per ounce on October 31, giving returns of up to 28 per cent, reinforcing their appeal amid global uncertainties.

Experts believe that precious metals will remain strong performers in 2025,



Maruti Dzire production hits 3-million mark

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, DEC. 31

Maruti Suzuki, India's biggest car maker, has achieved a new milestone with the production of its popular Dzire sedan, surpassing the 3-million-unit mark.

It took Maruti Suzuki 16 years and 11 months to build 3 million units of the Dzire. The first 1 million units were produced in April 2015, and the 2-million-unit mark was

breached in June 2019. "We are deeply grateful to our customers for their continued trust, which has been a key to achieving the milestone of 3 million production for the Maruti Suzuki Dzire," said Hisashi Takeuchi, managing director and CEO at Maruti Suzuki India. He said the latest Dzire, launched last month, has set a new benchmark with its modern design, advanced features, and exceptional fuel



efficiency. "Over the years, Dzire has significantly contributed to our sales, making it the sedan segment leader for 16 consecutive years," Takeuchi noted.

RUPEE ENDS AT NEW LOW OF 85.65 VS DOLLAR

Mumbai, Dec. 31: The rupee depreciated 13 paise to close at a fresh record low of 85.65 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, ending the year with a sharp 3 per cent loss on significant foreign fund outflows and a strong greenback in global markets.

Forex traders said the rupee has been under continued pressure amid the Federal Reserve's cautious stance on rate cuts and the "Trump factor" driving up the dollar index (DXY) and US 10-year bond yields.

Additionally, slowing domestic macroeconomic growth, widening trade deficit and persistent foreign fund outflows have further fuelled the rupee's depreciation.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.54 and touched the lowest level of 85.66 against the greenback during intra-day trade. The unit ended the session at 85.65 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a fall of 13 paise over its previous close.

On Monday, the rupee dropped 4 paise to 85.52 against the US dollar.

The domestic unit has depreciated against the greenback by almost 3 per cent from 83.16 on December 29, 2023, to 85.65 on December 31, 2024.

The local currency breached the 84-level on October 10, surpassed 85-a-dollar mark on December 19 and even touched the life-time low of 85.80 intraday on December 27, recording the steepest single-day fall in nearly two years. — PTI

RBI flags rising household debt

DEBT DETAILS

- Indian household debt stood at 42.9% of GDP at market prices in June 2024.
- Rise in household debt driven by increase in number of borrowers.

PRIMARY PURPOSES FOR HOUSEHOLD BORROWING:

- Consumption (personal loans and credit card debt for consumer durables).
- Asset creation (mortgage, vehicle loans).
- Productive activities (agriculture, business, education)



FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI DEC. 31

The Indian household debt has been increasing over the past three years but remains relatively low compared to other emerging market economies (EMEs), the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said in its December 2024 Financial Stability Report.

According to the report, household debt stood at 42.9 per cent of GDP at current market prices in June 2024. The central bank noted that the rise in household debt is primarily driven by an increase in the number of borrowers, rather than a rise in the average indebtedness per individual.

"At 42.9 per cent of GDP (at current market prices) in June 2024, India's household debt is relatively low compared to other EMEs, however, it has increased over the past three years," said the RBI's Financial Stability Report. Even as household debt is on a rising trend, the increase is driven by a growing number of borrowers rather than an increase in average

indebtedness. Borrowing by individuals in the household sector constituted around 91 per cent of the stock of household financial liabilities as at end of March 2024, said the report.

The report identified three primary purposes for household borrowing. The first is consumption, which includes personal loans, credit card debt, loans for consumer durables and other personal loans.

The second is asset creation, covering mortgage loans, vehicle loans, and two-wheeler loans. Lastly, productive activities, such as loans for agriculture, business ventures, and education, also form a significant part of household borrowing. Notably, close to two-thirds of the portfolio is of prime and above credit quality. Borrower-type analysis revealed that subprime borrowers availed loans primarily for consumption purpose, whereas super-prime borrowers used debt for asset creation, especially housing. Per capita debt of super-prime borrowers has increased sharply.

Core sector grows 4.3% in November

FC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, DEC. 31

Driven by robust construction activity, India's core sector growth rose to a four-month high of 4.3 per cent in November as compared to 3.7 per cent in October. The November month marks the third consecutive month of expansion in the eight core industries, with cement output rising maximum to 13 per cent in the month under review, government data showed on Tuesday.

As per the data, six of the eight sectors recorded an expansion in November, with cement, fertilisers and electricity

sectors performing the best while coal held steady. "The cement industry expanded at the fastest pace in 13 months of 13 per cent, rising from 3.1 per cent growth in the previous month, while the coal sector held steady with 7.5 per cent growth down from 7.8 percent in the previous month," the data showed.

"Also, electricity growth picked up to 3.8 percent from 2 per cent in the previous month, while fertiliser growth was 2 per cent from 0.4 per cent in October," it showed.

The expansion in core industries, especially cement, bodes well for the economy.



NPCI EXTENDS DEADLINE FOR UPI PLAYERS

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, DEC. 31

In a relief to Google Pay and Walmart-owned PhonePe, the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has extended the deadline for Unified Payments Interface (UPI) providers to adhere to its 30 percent market share limit by two more years to December 31, 2026.

NPCI has also lifted the UPI user onboarding limit for WhatsApp Pay, allowing it to extend UPI services to its entire user-base in India.

Previously, NPCI had permitted WhatsApp Pay to expand its UPI user base in a phased manner.

PhonePe and Google Pay have more than 85 percent share of the UPI market. Deadline extension gives them additional time to implement the proposed limits.

The rules impose a 30 percent volume cap on third-party UPI apps (TPAPs), though UPI apps offered by banks are exempt.

Premium products set to drive growth of appliances

New Delhi, Dec. 31: The appliances and consumer electronics industry expects 10-15 per cent growth in 2025 on the back of premiumisation trend, which is driven by rising incomes, changing preferences towards energy-efficient, and connected products with innovative features such as AI and increasing desire for global quality products.

The year 2024 was transformative for the industry, in which it bounced back despite challenges such as rising raw material costs, price hikes, and supply chain disruptions, and displayed resilience by embracing technology and innovation.

The industry, which contributes 0.6 per cent of the GDP, is witnessing a transformative shift towards premiumisation, increasing the average sale price (ASP), driven by rising income, and young demography with changing preferences.

Besides, factors such as a growing economy, urbanisation, real estate growth, and increasing penetration into smaller markets like tier-III cities and further, will also help the industry grow.

"Looking ahead, we expect the appliances industry to grow approximately 12-15 per cent in 2025," Godrej Enterprises Group, said. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Mhatre breaks Jaiswal's record

Ahmedabad: Mumbai's Ayush Mhatre on Tuesday set a new world record for the youngest player to score 150+ in List 'A' cricket during the Vijay Hazare Trophy match against Nagaland here, bettering compatriot Yashasvi Jaiswal's effort. At 17 years and 168 days, Mhatre broke the previous record set by India batter Jaiswal, who was 17 years and 291 days when he achieved the feat while playing for Mumbai against against Jharkhand in 2019.

Mhatre, who made his debut for domestic giants Mumbai earlier this season, clobbered 11 sixes and 15 fours to make 181 off only 117 balls while powering his side to an imposing 403 for seven in their 50 overs. Mhatre, who hails from the Virar suburb in Mumbai, has been a regular fixture for the domestic heavyweights across formats ever since he broke into the squad earlier this season. — PTI

Ananya bags air rifle national gold

Bhopal: Young Maharashtra shooter Ananya Naidu clinched the women's 10m air rifle gold defeating the experienced Meghana Sajjanar of the Railways by a fraction of a point in the National Shooting Championship Competitions here on Tuesday. Ananya, who trains regularly at legendary rifle shooter Anjali Bhagwat's academy in Pune, shot 252.5 in the final at the MP State Academy range to beat Meghana by a mere 0.2 points for her maiden senior national title.

R. Narmada Nithin of Tamil Nadu bagged the bronze with a score of 231.3. Ananya, who was a part of the Maharashtra contingent at the Khelo India University Games and took up shooting as a 16-year-old, took a 1.4-point lead after the first-five shots itself and never looked back. However, Meghana closed the gap and was in contention for the top podium finish but finally missed out in the 24-shots final. In the qualification round, Ananya finished eighth, while state-mate Arya Rajesh Borse topped with a score of 633.3. — PTI

IOA recognises golf body led by Reddy

New Delhi: The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) has given recognition to the Indian Golf Union (IGU) led by Harish Kumar Reddy while declaring the other body, headed by Brijinder Singh, void. A letter signed by IOA president P. T. Usha issued on Monday stated that the National Olympic Committee had "reviewed the facts" and "examined the procedural adherence" before recognising the body headed by Reddy. Two AGMs were held on December 15 to elect the new IGU office-bearers — one at the India Habitat Centre (IHC) where Singh was re-elected president with retired Punjab and Haryana High Court judge, Rameshwar Malik, as the Returning Officer, and the other at the Olympic Bhawan, where Reddy was elected with Justice OP Garg (Retd) as the RO.

In its letter, the IOA stated the reasons for recognising the body headed by Reddy, saying the Returning Officer, Justice Garg, had never resigned as alleged by the previous set of IGU office-bearers. — PTI

Raducanu out of Oz Open warm-up

Auckland: Former US Open champion Emma Raducanu pulled out of the Auckland Classic on Tuesday with a "back niggle" in a blow to her Australian Open preparations. Britain's Raducanu will now fly to Melbourne to begin rehabilitation ahead of the year's first major starting on January 12. The 22-year-old has suffered a series of injuries since bursting onto the scene with her New York triumph in 2021. "I've tried my best to be ready. I love Auckland and the fans here," the 56th-ranked Raducanu said. "But unfortunately I've picked up a back niggle and I won't be ready in time." Raducanu is travelling with renowned fitness coach Yutaka Nakamura in an attempt to better withstand the rigours of professional tennis. Raducanu missed a chunk of 2023 following wrist and ankle surgery, and was recently sidelined for two months by a foot injury. Former Australian Open semifinalist Elise Mertens also withdrew hours before the second seed's first-round match in Auckland. — AFP

SHUB FOR INDIA

Can Rohit fit in Gill for crucial Sydney Test?

Sydney, Dec. 31: Standing at the crossroads of his Test career, skipper Rohit Sharma has certain choices to make in the best interests of the Indian team heading into the fifth and final Test against Australia starting on Friday.

With the series in line after his team's 184-run drubbing in the Boxing Day Test, the Indian captain might have to field his six best batters at the Sydney Cricket Ground, which will pave the way for Shubman Gill's inclusion in the playing XI after being dropped for the previous game in Melbourne.

With 866 runs in Test cricket in 2024, Gill is second only to Yashasvi Jaiswal in the list of highest scorers among Indian batters in last one year, and one can't blame the elegant player if he is feeling hard done by at being asked to sit out at MCG. Rohit, though, informed that the team management explained Gill the reasons behind his omission in Melbourne.

ROHIT'S OPTIONS

The question that arises now is how does Rohit accommodate Gill in the playing XI for the Sydney game, which India need to win at all costs to keep alive their slim chances of qualifying for next year's World Test Championship Final.

Washington Sundar did himself no harm by scoring a 50 and was involved in a crucial hundred-plus stand with centurion Nitish Kumar Reddy. And if his bowling was penetrative enough, he would have certainly bowled more overs.

SCG has traditionally been a track that assists spinners as the match progresses and hence either Washington or Tanush Kotian is certain to play alongside Ravindra Jadeja, unless the skipper develops sudden faith in Jaiswal's leg-breaks and decides to play the specialist batter (Gill) and not the batting all-rounder (Washington). The Adelaide Test, played under lights with the pink Kookaburra, presented the Indian team with the most challenging circumstances and Gill, with scores of 31 and 28, looked way more comfortable than both Rohit and Virat Kohli.

The second option could be more convenient and it involves dropping one among Mohammed Siraj and Akash Deep to include Gill as three specialist pacers could be a luxury at SCG. — PTI

Dismal United in battle for survival

Manchester (United Kingdom), Dec. 31: Manchester United boss Ruben Amorim said the English giants are in a battle for Premier League survival after Newcastle cruised to a 2-0 win at Old Trafford to inflict a fourth consecutive defeat on the hosts.

Just two months into his tenure, Amorim conceded this week that his job is on the line unless results begin to improve.

The Portuguese has won just two of his first eight league games to leave United languishing down in 14th, just seven points above the relegation zone. "That is really clear, so we have to fight. It is a really difficult moment, one of the more difficult moments in the history of Manchester United and we have to address it with honesty," said Amorim on United being dragged into a relegation battle.

Alexander Isak and Joelinton struck inside the first 19 minutes as a fifth consecutive win lifted the Magpies into fifth.

Amorim stood aghast at what he was witnessing in the first half as Newcastle cut through the home side at will.

"They are a better team



With the series in line after his team's 184-run drubbing in the Boxing Day Test, India captain Rohit Sharma might have to field his six best batters in fifth Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground. — BCCI

Indian cricket can fill Virat, Rohit's void, says Lehmann

Melbourne, Dec. 31: Indian cricket has produced a generational superstar in Yashasvi Jaiswal and will remain in good health even when Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma decide to call time on their careers, feels former Australia head coach and two-time World Cup winner Darren Lehmann.

The 54-year-old, who played 27 Tests and 117 ODIs during his decade-long career, is also captivated by Jasprit Bumrah's skills, claiming to have never seen any player have more impact in a single series.

Talking about impending retirements of Rohit and Kohli following their poor show in the ongoing series where India trail 1-2, Lehmann was empathetic and practical about the transition in Indian cricket.

"Look whenever they decide to give it away and whatever happens in next few days they have been great players for India over a long period of time," Lehmann, a member of 1999 and 2003 ODI World Cup-winning teams said.

"Now actually we see younger players starting to step up for India and play well at next level. There is so much depth in Indian cricket I won't



India captain Rohit Sharma (right) and Virat Kohli. — PTI

worry too much," Lehmann was pretty matter of fact.

"Whenever these two guys decide to retire, there are so many talented youngsters that Indian cricket will be in good stead."

Having watched Jaiswal emerge as the flagbearer of Indian batting in the series, Lehmann made a bold prediction about the southpaw, who has scores of 161, 82 and 84 in this series. "Oh, superstar. One of the best I have seen," Lehmann said quickly, before the question was finished.

"He (Jaiswal) and Harry Brook are two next generation players. They are the ones that people will sit back and say they are good players. He played

very well in Melbourne and was outstanding in Perth. He has come up leaps and bounds on this tour," the beefy left-hander of yesteryears said.

But Lehmann reserved his highest praise for Bumrah, equating him with all-time greats such as Wasim Akram and Glenn McGrath.

"I presume he (Bumrah) is the next captain when Rohit finishes. He did a really good job in Perth. He is the best bowler I have ever seen live."

"I have seen Wasim Akram, Glenn McGrath and all but I have not seen a bowler have impact like him in a single series like Jasprit Bumrah has since Mitchell Johnson in 2013-14 Ashes win," he said. — PTI

BOOM CAPTAIN OF OZ'S TEST TEAM OF YEAR

Sydney, Dec. 31: Jasprit Bumrah was on Tuesday recognised for his splendid performances in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy as Cricket Australia named the Indian pace spearhead as the captain of its Test team of the year, which also features Yashasvi Jaiswal.

Bumrah has been the best bowler in Test cricket in 2024 with 71 wickets from 13 matches at an average of 14.92 and a strike rate of 30.16.

The peerless fast bowler has been the best bowler in the ongoing Border-Gavaskar Trophy with 30 wickets in just four Tests.

Apart from Bumrah, Jaiswal has been picked as the opener for his exploits with the bat in the year.

Meanwhile, Australia captain Pat Cummins failed to make it to the XI despite enjoying a good year with 37 wickets from nine matches.

Alex Carey and Josh Hazlewood were the two Australians in the team, while the others included England's Ben Duckett, Joe Root and Harry Brook, New Zealand's Rachin Ravindra and Matt Henry, Sri Lanka's Kamindu Mendis and South Africa's Keshav Maharaj. — PTI

WORLD | BLITZ CHESS



Indian Grandmaster R. Vaishali in action during the World Blitz Championship finals qualifying round in New York on Tuesday. — FIDE

Vaishali wins finals qualifier

New York, Dec. 31: Indian Grandmaster R. Vaishali surprised herself with a stellar performance to enter the quarterfinals of the World Blitz Championship here, even as recently-crowned rapid champion Koneru Humpy made an early exit.

Following Koneru Humpy's stellar performance in Rapid, which earned her the gold medal and a prize of \$60,000, it was Vaishali's turn to impress her fans. She triumphed in the women's section, scoring 9.5 points out of a possible 11 with three draws.

"I'm very happy with today's performance. Tomorrow will be a big day. I was not expecting the result like how it went today. Tomorrow, I have to be ready and prepare well and then see," Vaishali said.

Russian Kateryna Lagno came closest to Vaishali, scoring 8.5 points, while the remaining six qualifiers finished with an identical eight points. Despite meeting the points criteria, Humpy was eliminated due to the worst tiebreaker, finishing ninth.

In the Open section, 10 players were tied for first place, including world number one Magnus Carlsen. The Norwegian scored when needed and drew six of his 13 games,

● Following Koneru Humpy's stellar performance in Rapid, which earned her the gold medal and a prize of \$60,000, it was Vaishali's turn to impress her fans. She triumphed in the women's section, scoring 9.5 points out of a possible 11 with three draws.

finishing among the co-leaders at the end of the qualifiers.

Russian Ian Nepomniachtchi won the qualifier with 9.5 points, benefiting from the best tiebreak, while Fabiano Caruana of the United States finished second, ahead of Carlsen, who was placed third.

Surprisingly, none of the Indians made the top eight, despite some early promising performances.

Arjun Erigaisi played brilliantly at the start, securing victories in the first five rounds but faded away to finish with a sub-par seven points. R. Praggnanandhaa was the best-placed Indian, with 8.5 points, but a last-round loss to Russian Daniil Dubov cost him a spot in the quarterfinals.

In the women's quarterfinal, Vaishali will face Chinese Grandmaster Zhu Jiner. — PTI



Novak Djokovic of Serbia plays a shot against Rinky Hijikata of Australia during their Brisbane International second round match at the Queensland Tennis Centre in Brisbane on Tuesday. Djokovic won 6-3, 6-3. — AP

Djokovic, Sabalenka win season-openers

Brisbane (Australia), Dec. 31: Novak Djokovic and Aryna Sabalenka launched their Australian Open preparations with straight-sets wins on Tuesday at the Brisbane International but Nick Kyrgios lost on his return from injury.

Former world number one Djokovic, who is chasing a record 25th Grand Slam crown in January in Melbourne, eased to a 6-3, 6-3 victory over wildcard Rinky Hijikata.

The 37-year-old Serb broke Hijikata once in the first set and twice in the second for a comfortable 74-minute win.

Djokovic, now ranked seven in the world, was all business against the young Australian and always looked in control as he set up a second-round clash against fellow veteran Gael Monfils.

"To start the new season with a win is obviously very important," said Djokovic, who is pursuing an unprecedented 11th Australian Open title.

"But Hijikata was really good tonight and he made me work for it."

Women's world number one Sabalenka kickstarted her bid to win the Australian Open for a third consecutive time with a straight-forward win after a sluggish start.

The Belarusian appeared bothered by the high humidity, particularly during an error-strewn first set against Renata Zarazua.

But after breaking Mexico's Zarazua at 5-4, the 26-year-old surged through the second set to wrap up the match 6-4, 6-0 in 65 minutes. — AFP

THE RESULTS

Manchester United	0
Newcastle (Isak 4, Joelinton 19)	2
Ipswich Town (Delap 12-pen, Hutchinson 53)	2
Chelsea	0
Aston Villa (Watkins 36-pen, Rogers 47)	2
Brighton (Adingra 12, Lamprey 81)	2

Boxing Day loss against Fulham left them without a win in their last three matches.

The west Londoners had emerged as surprise title contenders after an eight-match winning run in all competitions.

But Maresca had insisted throughout that spell that Chelsea's inexperienced squad do not have what it takes to win the title in his first season after arriving from Leicester. And the Italian's prediction looks spot on after a shock result in Suffolk that leaves Chelsea in fourth place, 10 points behind leaders Liverpool, who have a game in hand. — AFP



Newcastle's Alexander Isak (left) scores against Manchester United during the English Premier League match at Old Trafford in Manchester on Monday. — AP

and they started very strong. When we suffer a goal it is really hard to turn around because of all the losses we had before and we don't have the base of work behind to cope with the difficult moments," added the

Manchester United coach.

IPSWICH DENT CHELSEA TITLE HOPES

Meanwhile, Chelsea's bid to climb back into the title race suffered a major blow as lowly Ipswich beat the Blues 2-0 at Portman Road

in Ipswich on Monday.

Enzo Maresca's side were rocked by Liam Delap's early penalty and a second half goal from former Chelsea winger Omari Hutchinson.

Chelsea's second successive defeat after their

